

PROPOSITIONAL CONCEPTS FOR INDIGENOUS SCULPTURAL FORMS

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Abstract

Nature provides an unending variety of visual experiences, while human beings are essentially part of the natural environment which makes up the landscape. Most, if not all objects used in humans' daily activities are in three-dimensional. In the landscape however, sculptures are placed in strategic locations to serve many purposes in which aesthetic is only an aspect. Meanwhile, not all sculptural forms are accepted in the society, even when they are placed in an appropriate habitat. There are many things to be considered in placing a work of art in the public. Importantly, the opinion of members of the society must be considered to some certain extent. Therefore, the public plays a significant role as a determining factor in placing an outdoor sculpture. This paper enumerates some of the factors that should be considered before placing a sculpture in the public and discusses the major religious and negative reactions that could come from the audience in the northern societies. This is because Islam does not accept representational figurative sculptures. Therefore, the author is proposing indigenous sculptural concepts that possibly could be acceptable in northern Nigeria. In the context of this paper; public and outdoor sculpture are interchangeably used, while, the paper also highlights the significance of public sculptures. The paper however, presents illustrative proposal drawings that could be articulated for sculptures using varied traditional sculpture materials, like concrete, fiber glass and steel.

Key Words: Sculpture, Forms, Indigenous, Public Space

Introduction

Since creation of the earth and human beings, the culmination of human thinking expressions and deed has been preserved in three-dimensional forms. Sculpture as a three-dimensional expression becomes a natural impulse for man to create. The availability of sculptural materials around the environment makes it normal for man to create. These materials are clay from the earth, wood from the trees, ivory from the horn of animals and simple found stone that abound in the environment. Therefore, the early man naturally became an artist with the available materials around him. The hunting tools were also fashioned by him, which was also made possible with what he could gather in the bush. The landscape offers varied possibilities for man and as a creative being; man conquered his environment making it habitable. But, what does sculpture mean to man in the society? According to William (1994), the early sculptures were created specifically for the purpose of ensuring fertility, good hunting, sanctuary of the soil and worshipping the gods. The artists were creating inherently aesthetically pleasing objects, with functionality in mind. Today however, sculptors have more freedom to choose a purpose for creating what they do individually. They are not bound by the past and they can be separated totally from the present. The age of freedom of expression where mixed media has an endless workability, diverse challenges and technological advancement abound beyond individual comprehension.

Humans and the landscapes co-existed in nature as God's creations. The natural environment provides an unending repertoire of visual experiences in which landscape plays a significant feature. However, there are numerous experiences encountered by humans daily in nature, the natural environment provides the landscape, rock formation, hills, tree bark with its natural textural patterns. Water and sand also add to the beauty of the landscape's unique morphology. Human activities, people meeting, forming into groups whose shape dissolves, to reform into patterns of even more complex compositions are part of the unique features the landscape offers (Stone, 1976). It should be noted that a man in his own natural ability has added enormously to the environment either negatively or positively. Some of man's activities to the landscape could be reconstruction of its features into an ugly environment, like deforestation which could eventually results to global warming. However, more positive impacts have been made by man to greatly improve the typographical setting of the landscape generally around the world.

On another perspective, the beautiful reconstruction of the landscapes with befitting structures will also attest to the effort of man to have added aesthetics to the tremendous work of nature,

thus, the birth of an artist in the environment. It is the creative ability of man to produce well planned edifice and befitting environment that would accommodate him and his family. So, he made a garden and cultivates the land to feed his family. All these are activities that transform the typography of the landscape. But in all these, what is paramount to the sculptors is how these forms come into existence as a tangible experience of his inner mind. Robinette (1976) reports that outdoor sculpture is one of the most visible and easily accessible ways to the environment, hence, some of the prominent sculptures around the landscapes demonstrate this. Some of these sculptures created are designed to be placed in especially designated locations by the artist, but most time they are placed in the wrong habitat. Robinette further opines that most sculptures that are not significantly placed could be owing to the fact that the sculptor or the designer might not have been given the free-hand of mounting the work appropriately. However, in the Nigerian context, placing of an outdoor sculpture in the suitable location might not be a problem. But the commissioned works most times are given on an individual preference to attract “kick back”. The term of reference is always given at the commencement of the commission but never adhered to. It is important that urban and regional planners, architects and the sculptors work together in the placement of outdoor sculptures in the environment for sustainable economic growth and development.

Public Sculpture

Public sculpture in the context of the paper means outdoor/public sculpture. This form of art expression is any media that has been planned and executed with the intention of being staged in the physical public domain usually outside and accessible to all. Public art may include any art expression exhibited in a public space including publicly accessible buildings. This art form in the contemporary time begins to expand in scope and application-both into other wider and challenging areas of art forms, and also across a much broader range of what might be called Public Realm. Such cultural interventions have often been realized in response to creatively engaging a community’s sense of Place or Well-being in society. Civil statutory monuments are some of the oldest officially sanctioned public art, while architecture itself is more widespread as public art (Public Art, 2017; Encyclopedia of Art, 2017).

Egonwa (1992) refers to public art as those creative objectifications such as sculptures pieces or paintings in our public places, commissioned by the people through their agents such as the Art Councils, Local Government Councils or Municipal Authorities for the emotional well-being of the people. Public art can provide a new way to experience the city, and the waterfalls were powerful examples. According to Fazakerly in Raquel (2009), public art is an artwork created by or with professional artists and legally sited in publicly accessible venue, which can be either out on the street, in a garden or inside a federal building. In Nigeria and probably in the entire globe, it will be out of place for an individual to erect a public sculpture without being commissioned by the authority or permission given. It might also be allowed for a sculptor to mount an installation temporarily for a period of time. This is also done with permission. However, in the western world there are programmes that commission artists through competitions to create high quality works for the federal buildings. It is strange, economically viable, despite its often high price tag, for instance, the New York’s Waterfalls cost about \$15.5million (Raquel, 2009).

According to Herring (2009), the sign of a great state or a great city is the strength of its cultural life. The arts are a highly cost effective way of driving economic revitalization in urban areas. The arts don’t just only add economic development but also shape human’s consciousness, create a collective attitude, inspire remarkable behaviour, and reduce stress. This is quite different in developing countries, except where the public sculpture attracts tourism like the monumental statue in Senegal entitled *African Renaissance Monument* standing at 160feet tall, this gigantic sculpture is over one-and-a-half times the height of the Statue of Liberty (Morton, 2017).

Conceptual Framework

The idea of this conceptual framework is based on Adeyemo is (2016) and Robinette’s (1996) assertions on the position of the erection of public sculpture. Robinette (1996) reports that, the unavoidable truth is that not all outdoor sculptures are well received even in the western world by its audience. The public must be acknowledged and considered in the placement of any

outdoor sculpture in a given environment. Most times one can't explain the animosity that is exacerbated by misunderstanding to the point of stubborn rejection. Some of these reasons for rejection are sometimes difficult to determine especially when it is decisive outside the religious perspective.

What will one do about the negative reactions of the audience especially in the northern societies? It cannot be over emphasized that figurative sculptures are not accepted by Islam and the majority of the northern populace are Muslims. So, artists will mostly consider what would be accepted as an outdoor sculpture in the environment. The second position is premised therefore on Adeyemo who recommends that, figurative sculptures should be avoided and encourages non-representational figurative sculptural expressions. The author therefore proposed indigenous sculptural concepts for Northern Nigeria. Some concepts in drawing are presented in the paper to showcase the possibilities of indigenous sculptural forms that might be suitable and accepted in the Northern States of Nigeria.

Evolution of Outdoor Sculptures in Nigeria

In Nigeria the use of outdoor sculpture for environmental adornment in the South is long in history. The documentation of decorative sculptures in the Oba's palace attests to the art historical studies. As early as in 1934, the Colonial Government in the then Southwestern Nigeria has commissioned a foreign artist to produce *Ogedengbe* staff to commemorate the Veteran *Ijesa* War-Lord. The staff was installed in front of *Owa's* palace at *Ilesa*. The next known sculpture to have followed is the image of the *Unknown Soldier* executed in 1948, popularly known as *Sojadumata* erected at *Idumota* area in Lagos (Romkalilu and Oladugbagbe, 2013).

According to Bamisile (2011), modern sculpture in Nigeria as an aspect of the public setting could be historically traced to the Catholic Missionaries. The missionaries initiated a significant influence on the traditional sculptors, which will be addressed in this paper. A workshop started by the Catholic Missionaries made the installations of public outdoor sculptures possible in the Southwestern Nigerian. Kenneth C. Murray was the first British colonial officer assigned to teach art in Nigeria in 1927. With his effort, the creation and installation of outdoor sculptures emerged. His approach to art was to encourage students to conceptualize forms within the contents and boundaries of their indigenous cultures. His belief in the synergy of traditional and modern ideation was later called natural synthesis by the Zaria rebels as coined by Fuso in 1986. This idea became their identification mark. They incorporated the new idea into public buildings like schools and churches. The experimental workshop at Oye-Ekiti became the first practical workshop established by father Kelvin Carrol in 1947. The workshop was a major step in the introduction of sculpture into the mainstream of architecture in Nigeria. However, sculptures of Christian theme started emerging from the traditional artisans. Some of the works produced will include crucifixes, Christmas cribs, figures of saints, doors and some other decorative objects for utilitarian purposes. Ben Enwonwu was the pioneer student of Kenneth Murray and was also encouraged to incorporate traditional and modern ideas into his sculptures. Some of his outdoor sculptures include *Queen Elizabeth* which stands at the Federal House of Assembly, Lagos and *Awaking*, a bronze sculpture among others.

Bamisile further notes that Lamidi Fakeye is another well-known traditional artist who later joined the Murray's school. He was a talented young man that combined his traditional wood carving method with the modern practices. Examples of his public outdoor sculptures are *Edena Gate* (four veranda post) and two doors at Ooni of Ife's palace, *Ile-Ife* executed in 1953, *Oduduwa* statue at *Oduduwa* hall, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife in 1987. It could be noted that at the end of the 1950s, the success of Onabolu and the expatriates' school had yielded enormous results in introducing arts into Nigerian schools. Fine arts as a course was introduced in the higher institutions of learning, like the then Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology at Ibadan in 1953, and later moved to the Zaria branch of the college, which is now called Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in Kaduna state, Nigeria. The other newly established Art schools include, Ife Art School, now Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife established in 1962, Nsukka Art School, and University of Nsukka (UNN) established in 1960.

Review of Selected Public Sculpture



Fig. 1: Ben Enwonwu, Anyanwu, 1954-1955, Source, independent.com, 2017



Fig. 2: Biodun Sodehinde, Three Idejo chief, Welcome, 1991, fibre glass, 240cm high, Photograph by Sola Ogunfuwa, 2007

Fig. 1 entitled *Anyanwu* is one among the few public sculptures executed by Ben Enwonwu in Nigeria in the 1960's. The sculpture was created to mark the Museum's establishment by the British artist and archeologist Kenneth Crosthwaite Murray, who was known to be the pioneer British teacher in Nigeria. *Anyanwu* as a figurative sculpture has been able to exemplify the combination of dramatic movement, anthropomorphic and vegetal form in outlook. *Anyanwu* according to the Bonham's Magazine means "the Sun" in the Igbo language. This bronze sculpture is about 6feet 10inches high dressed in the royal regalia of the Bini or Igbo tradition. The original of this sculpture stands in front of the National Museum in Lagos produced in 1954-1955 (Bonhams Magazine, 2017).

Fig. 2 is an outdoor sculpture by Biodun Sodehinde executed in 1991, *Three Idejo Chiefs* was originally positioned at the point of entry to Lagos to welcome visitors to the centre of excellence. However, due to some superstitious belief and to stop the statue from being burnt down, it was moved to its present location in Epe. Even though the statue was previously meant to welcome people to Lagos, the sculpture is rich in meaning. The three chiefs represent the three kinds of traditional greetings in Lagos Island. All the chiefs display clenched fists with the right hand always placed above the left. This signifies the supremacy of the right over the left. This monument is 12 ft. tall (Romkalilu and Oladugbagbe, 2013).



Fig. 3: Mandate, Duke Igbiniedion Divas, 1999, National Assembly arena in Abuja, the Capital of Nigeria. www.nigerianbestforum.comblog/at-the-feet-of-a-growing-monument/ NBC News, 2017

Fig. 3 titled *Mandate* is a colossal sculptural piece executed by Duke Igbiniedion Divas limited of Benin city, Edo State, Nigeria in 1999. This historical sculpture was created with concrete and bronze and stands at a circumference of 15feet and the overhanging gold-plated mace of 40feet in length. This sculpture was executed at the rebirth of democracy with such an expression of unity, the combination of the national flag and the Coat of arms. It stands at the centre of the National Assembly. The picturesque of the forearm of a masculine giant bearing up the mace, the sign of authority of the legislature, is there to receive the visitors at the entrance of the National Assembly arena in Abuja, the Capital of Nigeria (Josiah, 2010).

The Non Acceptability of Figural Forms in Northern Nigeria

Figurative representation of sculptures generally in the Northern part of Nigeria has not been given adequate attention owing to many reasons of which the paramount among them centres on religious belief. Specifically, Islam frowns against the making of three-dimensional figurative sculptures. According to Adeyemo (2016), there are several justifications for the rejection of figurative representational sculptures in Northern Nigeria, while some that have been created are either removed or destroyed. Most times, this act is motivated by political and religious factors. For example, *Mama Tapgun's sculpture* is one of the popular sculptures destroyed in the Jos main market in Plateau State in 2008, the *Headless Famer* in Kaduna Central Market, in the early 1980s, and also the *Fulani Milk Maid* in Gyadi in Kano State also in the 1980s. Meanwhile, these are just three among several sculptures that have been destroyed in the Northern parts of Nigeria.

How about sculptures that are non-figurative or representational that are still not accepted in some communities in the North? Many motives have been suggested and attributed to the problem of non-acceptability of sculpture by masses in the northern states. Some drastic steps in articulating concepts that will situate an awareness of the acceptability of the other forms of sculptures that are not representational have to be positioned. For example, what types of sculpture will be accepted in the core northern states? Of course, one will be quick to answer-non-representational sculptures, but that might not be true. One cannot categorically conclude because even outside the religious belief there are some other reasons why some people in a community will not like certain types of sculptures and this differs from one community to the other. Some important considerations must be made in determining what the audience will appreciate as an outdoor sculpture. Therefore, it will be vital to logically consider what could be acceptable by most of the populace in a community in which any outdoor sculpture has to be mounted.

No doubt, there has been destruction of some public sculptures in the environments especially in State Capitals in Nigeria. Yet, some have been erected in some other places, for instance; most of the military barrack abode several figurative sculptures of soldiers. Another good example is the Department of Fine Art's Sculpture Garden that turns out quite a number of figurative sculptures yearly. The sculpture garden receives several visitors from far and near and it has become one of the most popular attractions in Zaria. These sculptures are situated in various

establishments that have sole control over their properties, like in the case of the Department of Fine Arts sculpture Garden and the Barracks. These institutions are well guarded and secured to some extent from those that could vandalize them. Academic institutions are good habitat for mounting sculptures generally owing to the control they have over the sculptures and the environment.

This paper has established hypothetically that some types of sculptures are relatively accepted in the north. It is on this back drop that the writer proposes indigenous sculptural concepts that could be feasible for general acceptance in northern Nigeria. These concepts that are proposed are not totally new in the landscape of sculptures in northern Nigeria; however, it will be one of such additional concepts that could be adopted as viable sculptural expressions. Conversely, sculpture that can be accepted in one community as a form of expression might as well be rejected in another community, yet all in the north. Therefore, this proposal is not a means to an end, variety of options abound. However, considering a positive perspective, people's perceptions and opinions still matter in mounting a sculpture in the public. The question, however is will artist prepare a structured questionnaire and administer to people for their opinions before erecting an outdoor sculpture? No, but it is possible to know from experience having stayed in a particular environment for some number of years. Otherwise one can hypothetically and logically assume what people of a community will value by asking experts of sculpture in that community.

Sources of ideas / Concept Development in Drawings

Pots and calabashes are some of the basic utilitarian objects used mostly and generally by women in almost if not every part of the rural and some parts of the urban centres in Nigeria. These objects serve practical functions or purposes in human daily activities, especially among the pastoral Hausa Fulani women in Northern Nigeria. For instance, they use these items for serving food, for milking, storing of water, cooking, carrier vessels and some other domestic functions. Therefore, the people in the northern communities can be said to be conversant with these objects and could also recognize them when they are used as sculptural elements. For example, the traditional musical instrument called *Shantu* is a calabash instrument, is a common household item used by women in the north. Also, the *Goje* is another musical instrument used by men that is also well known. These are some of the objects used creatively in composing these sculptures below for easy identification by the populace and also for acceptability.

Traditional Local Objects and Musical Instrument as Data





Figs. 1, 2, 3 and 4, Calabashes, Sources of Data Collection, hutterstuck.com, 20/8/2017



Figs. 5 and 6, *Shantu* Hausa Musical Instrument, <https://www.google.com.ng/search?source=hp&q=shantu+hausa+music&oq=s>, 20/8/2017





Figs. 7and 8, Gbagyi pots, Niger State.
Gbagyi (Gwari) People: The Indigenous People of Abuja and A Trip Down Memory Lane -
Blogger673 × 681search By Image



Fig. 9: Goje, Hausa Musical Instrument,
<https://www.google.com.ng/search?q=local+hausa+instrument>



Fig. 10: Harp- Kora Hausa
Instrument,<https://www.google.com.ng/search?q=local+hausa+instrument>
Drawings of the Indigenous Sculptural Concepts





Plates I, II and III: Lasisi Lamidi, 2017, Sculptural Concepts with Traditional Local Pots and Calabashes, Pen on Paper, 22x30cm Pen on Paper, 22x30cm





Plates IV, V and VI: Lasisi Lamidi, 2017, Sculptural Concepts with Traditional Local Pots and Calabashes, Pen on Paper, 22x30cm





Plates VII, VIII and IX: Lasisi Lamidi, 2017, Sculptural Concepts with Traditional “Shantu” Musical Instruments, Pen on Paper, 22x30cm





Plates X, XI and XII: Lasisi Lamidi, Sculptural “Goje” Concepts, Pen on Paper, 22x30cm

Proposed Habitat and Dimension of sculpture:

- a. Major Round-about
- b. Local Round-About
- c. Institutions of higher learning
- d. Federal and Local Government Secretaries
- e. Parastatal Federal and Local Government

Methods and Materials

There are different approaches in carrying out a project of this nature, but the first thing to be considered is the material of execution. This will also determine other variables, like dimension of the intended sculpture. The proposed dimension will also depend of the client. In this proposal three approaches are suggested.

- i. Construction using steel
- ii. Modelling and casting using either concrete or fibre glass
- iii. Direct cement modelling

The following materials will be needed:

1. Armature Construction: 12mm, 10mm, 9mm for the construction of the armature.
2. 20/22mm sheet metal for the making of the form.
3. 12mm and 10mm for decorative motifs and patterns on the constructed form.
4. 3x3, 4x4 angle bars for the making of the base.
5. Monochromatic or polychromatic surface finishing could be applied.

Modelling and Casting

1. 10mm, 12mm and 10mm, for the making of the armature
2. 3x3, 4x 4 angles bar for the construction of the base
3. Wood or paper for the stuffing of the armature
4. Clay for modelling
5. lubricant as separating agent
6. Plaster of Paris (P.O.P)
7. Wood and fibre mat for the reinforcement
8. Charging using either concrete or fibre glass
9. Finishing materials / auto paint

Direct Cement

1. 14mm, 12mm, 10mm, and 9mm for the construction of the armature
2. Chicken mesh
3. 3x3, 4x4 angle bars for the making of the base
4. Cement
5. finishing/ bees wax/ auto paint

General Benefits of this project

- i. People can easily identify the indigenous objects in the sculpture and estimate their value
- ii. stimulate emotion
- iii. raise visual awareness
- iv. inspires budding artists and the youth in the environment
- v. engage unskilled labour during the execution
- vi. trigger appreciation of indigenous traditional artifacts
- vii. encourage economic development
- viii. motivate green areas development
- ix. add value to the environment
- x. create traditional and cultural relevance in the society
- xi. beautification of the environment
- xii. recreational and relaxation point for the society
- xiii. improve urban and landscape planning

Conclusion

Arts and culture play important values in the growth of an economy and they are vehicles to economic development which also improves the well-being of the people in an environment. Most Nigerian cities are planned without adequate considerations about future plans and development. In planning of some urban centres, there are even no provisions for urban open spaces or the green areas, where sculptures and recreational activities can be located. It is the view of the author that urban and regional planners, architects and artists especially sculptors should endeavour to collaborate in handling some of these environmental projects. It is a known fact that commissions and projects are awarded on the bases of "man know man" in Nigeria today, but that should not discourage individual professional efforts in coming together to make some of these personal or collaborative ideas become ineffective. It is true that some of these ideas might not work in the ministries but could possibly be considered as collaborate work in any academic settings. It is a well-known fact that major projects like erecting of public sculptures and fountains are awarded by the Government either at local or federal levels. But in this context; this proposal could be presented to Ahmadu Bello University Management for consideration. The other point is that even if the Ahmadu Bello University Management is interested in the project, it must still pass through some people that do not have adequate capacity to handle the project. In essence, it might not get to those that matter in handling the project. The departments of Fine Arts, Urban and Regional Planning and Architecture might not be involved in the execution. It is recommended that in awarding this type of commission; the architects, urban and regional planners and artists should be considered in the decision making process before approving such projects. It is sad that most of the public sculptures around have been given on "man knows man" or "long legs" basis. This does not allow for proper screening of commissioned works in the Nigerian societies and it must be stopped for adequate economic development and growth.

Contribution to knowledge

The following will be the contributions of this proposal:

- a. Develop visual documentation of Nigerian indigenous sculptural concepts derivative of calabash, "Shantu" and "Goje" forms that could be executed in sculpture.
- b. Improve the typographical and morphological appearances of the landscape.
- c. Give relevance to sculptural appreciation in the society.
- d. Add economic value to the society.

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